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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BUREAU DE INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum

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TO : The Secretary
THROUGH : S/S *Roger Hilsman*
FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT : Our Major European Allies and the Cuban Crisis

Although day-to-day European reactions to the Cuban crisis have been reported in considerable detail, it has seemed to us worthwhile to take a look at some of the reasons why the reactions were what they appeared to be, at least in the case of our major allies. We have therefore prepared brief analyses of both official and public response to the initial US actions and to ensuing developments in the UK, West Germany, France, and Italy.

ABSTRACT

In general, the response has supported US actions thus far. However, the character and promptness of this support have varied from country to country, and there have also been variations in the degree to which governmental and popular reactions have appeared to coincide or diverge. The different reactions in the several countries reemphasize the fact that Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, and British still hold distinctly individual views of their respective national interests. They also reveal significantly the bearing that the local political situation may have on a government's reaction: the official Italian reaction, for example, was to a substantial extent conditioned by domestic political considerations, while the French (de Gaulle's) view was virtually independent of such influence.

A. France

The French Government gave the United States full official support on its Cuban policy. The bulk of non-Communist opinion generally understood and accepted the reason for the US action, though there was at first some cynical reference to domestic electoral factors and some uncertainty as to the validity of the evidence on which the US had acted. Just below the surface of support for the US, however, were more serious reservations, reflecting displeasure that France had been informed of but not consulted on the decision, and of course disquiet as to where the situation might lead.

General de Gaulle apparently believed that the US was entitled to take this action in a part of the world so important to itself and that it was the part of an ally to give the action political support. But while Foreign Minister Couve de Murville was quoted as saying that the US could not have

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been expected to consult its allies fully in such a case, de Gaulle almost certainly resented the absence of such consultation. This is all the more likely because de Gaulle, like everyone else, was fully aware of the possibility that the Cuban crisis might produce eruptions in Berlin or elsewhere. Had the situation so developed, further French support could not have been taken for granted in the absence of a greater degree of consultation.

In fact, the French seem to have believed almost from the beginning--October 23--that war was not likely because the Soviet Union would not press the crisis to that point. They therefore looked to some form of negotiation to handle the immediate problem. De Gaulle has little regard for the UN or the role it can play in such affairs, but he did not obstruct US efforts to use the organization as a locale of negotiation or a vehicle for inspection of the Cuban bases. He probably would not have welcomed a Big Two meeting, even one ostensibly confined to the Cuban situation, for he would have found it hard to believe that other questions--of greater direct interest to France--would not have arisen. Nor would he have been eager to have a Big Four meeting on this crisis, since it too would have implied worldwide bargaining in which the US, in return for Soviet concessions on Cuba, might have made concessions elsewhere. The French also opposed the idea of dismantling bases in Turkey in return for dismantling those in Cuba.

The denouement of the crisis on October 28 was as satisfactory from the French point of view as could have been hoped, in that no worldwide bargaining took place and the US apparently paid no more for the dismantling of the Cuban bases than to indicate willingness not to proceed militarily against the Castro regime itself. The outcome has been hailed in the French press as a major US and Western victory.

B. Germany

Both official and public opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin firmly supported the US decision to interdict further delivery of strategic weapons materials to Cuban ports and to demand removal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba.

The support for the US, which was so quickly forthcoming and so strongly maintained by the West Germans throughout the crisis days, is clearly based on more than the desire to express a superficial solidarity with a powerful ally in an area where no German interest is directly prejudiced by that ally's acts. The basis for this support is the conviction that the US cannot afford to show weakness in the face of outright Soviet pressure lest it jeopardize the credibility of its determination to defend itself and thus undermine the very purpose of the Western alliance.

The apparent success of US tactics in the Cuban crisis provides an

immeasurably significant tonic to the morale of the West Germans, giving them clearcut encouragement to overcome their own latent fear of some eventual deterioration in the Western posture vis-a-vis the Soviets in Berlin or elsewhere in Europe. However, given the demonstrated US willingness to seek resolution of these difficulties by peaceful means and without critical sacrifice of prestige to either side, the West Germans remain sensitive to future US-Soviet negotiations, whether on the Cuban crisis specifically or with open agendas. Despite their fear of war, they hesitate to leave such problems as the Allied position in Berlin exposed to the fortunes of the conference table. They would willingly accept an effective international disarmament agreement, but, failing such, their confidence in the Western alliance will continue to depend directly on the degree of firmness shown by the US.

C. Italy

The cautious posture of both the Italian Government and press at the beginning of the Cuban crisis was generally in line with Italian attitudes on any "unilateral" actions Italy's major allies might take in areas peripheral to Italy's immediate interest, influence, and commitment. Italy's official assurances of "solidarity" with the US in the Cuban crisis, therefore, were dictated more by the recognition of its impotence to influence the situation than by wholehearted approval of US policy.

The expressed Italian concern over the risks of escalation of the US action and Italian support for a negotiated solution of the crisis were undoubtedly reinforced by domestic political considerations, such as the wish to mollify the Socialists' sensitivities and the desire to avoid any divergence from the Vatican's public position on the crisis. The Pope's appeal for moderation and for negotiation of the US-USSR controversy in Cuba necessarily influenced the attitude of the Catholic-led government of Fanfani. In addition, and more importantly, the Nenni Socialists' opposition to "unilateral" policies for the solution of international problems, their habitual support for negotiated solutions, and their opposition to the "extension" of the Italian NATO commitment, all stemming from traditional Socialist "neutralist" views on foreign affairs, undoubtedly contributed to the government's vigorous backing of a "way out" of the Cuban controversy.

Finally, Fanfani's attitude was also colored by pique at not having been "consulted" in advance of the contemplated US action. Christian Democratic Secretary Aldo Moro, though more outspoken than Fanfani in private expression of support for US action, reportedly also expressed "regrets" that lack of consultation had deprived the Italian leadership of the opportunity of preparing the "psychological" grounds for an explanation and justification of the US action to Italian public opinion. Moro felt that the Cuban crisis would place some strains on Christian Democratic-Socialist relations, but that the international situation was of such importance that its correct "resolution had to take precedence over any purely domestic Italian problems." Even

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the Socialists, although critical of the US action and skeptical about its necessity and results, reassured Embassy officers that there would be "no question" as to where the Socialist Party would stand in the event of an East-West showdown over the Cuban controversy.

The Italian Government's reaction to the Cuban crisis, as presented in parliament by Fanfani, had the support of all Italian political forces with the exception of the Communists, the Monarchists, and the Neo-Fascists. The Communists branded Fanfani's posture vis-a-vis the US action as that of a "satellite" of the "aggressive" US "imperialist" forces. The Monarchists and the Neo-Fascists, on the other hand, stressed the "embarrassment" of the center-left government over the US action.

It was not the Fanfani government alone that felt concern over the US action, as indicated by the fact that the government's conservative opposition press began to castigate Fanfani for his lukewarm support of the US action only a considerable time after the announcement of this support, and when it had begun to appear that the crisis might be resolved successfully.

One interesting aspect of the Italian reaction was the fact that the Nenni Socialists, although critical of the US action itself, refused to join the Communists in "united action" in the streets and in parliament. There is little doubt that this explains, at least in part, the Communists' reluctance to translate their hysterical press attacks against both the US and the Fanfani government into widespread demonstrations.

As the crisis unfolded there was increasing appreciation in the press and in parliament of the validity and effectiveness of the US action, and also a better understanding of the extent of the danger posed to the US and the West by the Soviet missile build-up in Cuba. Nevertheless, apprehension remained, and when it appeared that a peaceful solution was at hand, Italian official and press reactions generally indicated relief at the turn of events as well as appreciation of the success of the Kennedy policy in the Cuban crisis.

D. The United Kingdom

The UK Government expressed its support for the US at every stage of the Cuban crisis, although it stopped short of offering to participate in specific action against the Soviet Union. Its support was somewhat cautious at first, but became more positive as the crisis, and UK realization of its implications, developed. Accordingly, the British gave the US the degree of support that they concluded was merited by a situation affecting the vital interests of their chief ally, and indirectly their own.

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The UK believed that the Soviet establishment of missile bases in Cuba had opened up a new area of instability and threatened to upset the balance of power. The British accepted the new US evidence of the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and concluded that such missiles would significantly alter not only the Cuban, but also the East-West, situation.

The UK Government shared the conviction that it was important to prove to the United States' allies and friends that Washington would not permit the Soviet Union to break its word with impunity. Like Washington, London felt that allowing such deception to go uncalled would cause Allied and friendly capitals to doubt the steadfastness of the leaders of the Western Alliance. The Macmillan government realized that answering the Soviet provocation in Cuba simply by holding talks, which might well have been followed by an agreement in which the West might have lost ground to the Communists, would have damaged the interests of the Western Alliance. Macmillan told Commons, October 30, that if the US had drawn back on the key issue of removal of Soviet missiles, the Alliance could have suffered a fatal blow.

Although the UK Government undoubtedly would have appreciated having been consulted, rather than merely informed, about the proposed US quarantine, Macmillan himself conceded the need for swift action and avoided any hint of complaint. Indeed, it may be suggested that some British admired the US for eschewing time-consuming consultation and daring to take bold action on a matter that affected its vital interests.

In contrast to the government position, initial UK press reaction to the US Cuban quarantine was largely unfavorable, with only one major paper (Conservative) applauding it. After the Khrushchev backdown on October 27, the press became less critical of the US and hailed the apparent resolution of the crisis as a tremendous diplomatic victory for the US, a demonstration that there was a point beyond which the US could not be pressed, and a good omen for possible progress on disarmament. The opposition Labor Party reaction was also generally critical of the US action. Both in Parliament and outside, however, the Labor reaction was relatively restrained. As for public reaction, although there were some anti-US demonstrations, apparently organized by Communists, ban-the-bomb, and unilateral disarmament groups, the "man in the street" and the majority of the public seemed to support the US action.

The muting of criticism of the US after Khrushchev's capitulation on October 27 is mainly evidence that "nothing succeeds like success." Chief reason for a trend even before October 27 toward more favorable judgments of the US action appears to have been the mounting evidence (first the photographs of the sites, and then the USSR's implied admission in the UN that it had indeed placed offensive missiles in Cuba) of a budding Soviet threat to the US and the West in Cuba. Another factor was the government's

acceptance of lack of consultation before action by the US as having been necessitated by the extreme urgency of the situation. The forbearance of shipowners and the government in not publicly protesting what they considered an illegal US blockade was also helpful.

Underlying the early relatively unfavorable press reactions was a complex of attitudes. First, announcement by the US of economic sanctions against Cuba, including US interference with freedom of free-world shipping, had been expected and was almost universally deplored as likely to prove ineffective and indeed threatening to drive Cuba further into the Communist camp. It appears that at first editorialists may have believed that the US was falsely claiming that offensive missiles were in Cuba in order to justify the drastic action which domestic US political pressure was demanding of the Kennedy administration.

Aside from this, some segments of the UK press, which hold that the co-existence of the Communist and Free Worlds is not only possible but the only feasible course, have long tended to consider the US as obsessed with Castro. Their realization that the very existence of the British people was threatened by a US-USSR power confrontation over an area of no direct interest to the UK made them more fearful than was the US, faced with a threat in its own backyard. There appeared also to be a feeling that Khrushchev would not or could not back down and that a resolution of the crisis short of war was by no means certain. In such situations they feel that the West must be prepared to go more than halfway to effect a compromise -- since Western civilization itself is in jeopardy.

Criticism of the precipitateness of the US action apparently stemmed from a feeling that this had increased the risk of war and lessened the chances of effective UN and OAS action (the subsequent overwhelming Latin American support of the US stand must have surprised the editorialists and contributed to the muting of their criticism of the US). In this, as in most other actions in the international arena, Britons still tend to consider the US an immature latecomer to the world stage and to contrast superior British political acumen with what is seen as American brashness.

The contrast between the government's support of the US and the skeptical and sometimes critical stand of the Labor Party can probably be explained mainly by the fact that the opposition, not being in power, could afford the luxury of acting less responsibly, i.e., as if the situation were not one calling for the use of force. Labor was also less constrained from displaying its distrust of the United States' qualifications to act as leader of the Free World. Chagrined by the declining importance of the UK, Laborites -- like many other Britons -- fear unilateral action by the US and resent the apparent lack of respect for, and confidence in, the UK that

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lack of consultation and resort to unilateral measures seems to them to indicate. They feel that US policy toward the Communist Bloc often threatens to assume the proportions of an anti-Communist crusade, whereas they hold that getting along with the Communists is not sinful but necessary. Some Labor leaders go so far as to believe that there is little difference between the forward-base strategies of the US and the Soviet Union.

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